

CLAIMS

We Claim:

1. A method of using an electronic communications network, in which a sender can send a message to a recipient, the network including a server for facilitating communications between the sender and the recipient, the method comprising the steps of:

linking a sound file to an emoticon contained in a sender-generated message; and forwarding the emoticon and its link to the sound file to the recipient.

2. A method as claimed in Claim 1 further comprising the step of:

at the recipient, displaying the emoticon and audibly playing the sound file linked to the emoticon.

3. A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of linking comprises making a dynamic association, established by the sender, for that particular message being sent.

4. A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of linking comprises automatically generating a link according to the particular emoticon being sent.

5. A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of linking comprises automatically generating a link according to the combination of the particular emoticon being sent and the particular recipient.

6. A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of linking is performed by the sender.

7. A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of linking is performed by the server.

8. A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of linking comprises attaching the sound file to the message, and wherein the step of forwarding comprises forwarding both the message and the sound file.

9. A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of linking comprises creating a pointer to a sound file and attaching the pointer to the message.

10. A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of forwarding comprises forwarding a
5 MIME-encoded attachment.

11. A method as claimed in Claim 1 further comprising the step of determining if the server already has the sound file, and if not sending the sound file to the server.

10 12. A method as claimed in Claim 1 further comprising the step of determining if the recipient already has the sound file, and if not sending the sound file to the recipient.

13. A method of using an electronic communication network, in which a sender can send a message to a recipient, the network including a server for facilitating communication between the
15 sender and recipient, the method comprising the steps of:

associating a sound file with an emoticon;

sending the emoticon to the server;

sending the emoticon from the server to the recipient;

20 determining if the recipient needs the sound file, and if so forwarding this sound file to the recipient; and

playing the sound file at the recipient when the emoticon is displayed.

14. A method for playing an audio file associated with an emoticon contained in a message sent by a sender to a recipient, the method comprising:

25 analyzing a message received by the recipient to find an emoticon is contained in the message; and

causing a sound file associated with an emoticon found in the message to be executed.

15. An apparatus for use in an electronic communications network, in which a sender can send a message to a recipient, the network including a server for facilitating communications between the sender and the recipient, the apparatus comprising:

first logic configured to link a sound file to an emoticon contained in a sender-generated message; and

second logic configured to forward the emoticon and its link to the sound file to the recipient.

16. The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the first logic performs the linking using a dynamic association, established by the sender, for that particular message being sent.

17. The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the first logic performs linking by automatically generating a link according to the particular emoticon being sent.

18. The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the first logic performs linking by automatically generating a link according to the combination of the particular emoticon being sent and the particular recipient.

19. The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the first logic comprises a communications server in communication with the sender and with the recipient.

20. The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein a computer of the sender comprises the first logic.

21. The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the first logic performs linking by attaching the sound file to the message, and wherein the second logic forwards both the message and the sound file.

22. The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the first logic performs linking by creating a pointer to a sound file and attaching the pointer to the message.

23. The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the second logic forwards the emoticon and its link to the sound file in the form of an MIME-encoded attachment.

24. An apparatus for playing an audio file associated with an emoticon contained in a message sent by a sender to a recipient, the apparatus comprising:

first logic configured to analyze a message received by the recipient to locate an emoticon contained in the message; and

second logic configured to cause a sound file associated with an emoticon located by the first logic to be executed.

25. A computer program for linking an emoticon to a sound file, the program being embodied on a computer-readable medium, the program comprising:

a first code segment for linking an emoticon to a particular sound file; and

a second code segment for causing the emoticon and link to the sound file to be forwarded to the recipient.

26. A computer program for playing a sound file associated with an emoticon contained in a message sent by a sender to a recipient, the program being embodied on a computer-readable medium, the program comprising:

a first code segment for analyzing a message to find an emoticon contained in the message; and

a second code segment for causing a sound file associated with an emoticon found in the message to be played.

27. A method of using an electronic communications network, in which a sender can send a message to a recipient, the network including a server for facilitating communications between the sender and the recipient, the method comprising the steps of:

at the recipient, displaying the emoticon and audibly playing a sound file linked to the emoticon.